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VI.—WHY DID GANELON HATE ROLAND?

In the words of Dante, "Carlo Magno perdè la santa gesta"; he lost it thru the base treachery of his brother-in-law, Ganelon. Ganelon became a traitor, we have been told, first, because of bribes, and, second, because of his hatred of Roland. As Gaston Paris formulated it, "In the beginning, Ganelon was a traitor only because he was bought by the gold of the pagans; later on, they rendered the situation more interesting and at the same time increased the importance of Roland by adding the motive of the hatred of Ganelon against Roland."¹ Thus far, nearly all have been agreed; but when we go a step further and ask, What was the cause of this hatred, the answers vary: simply because the two men were step-father and step-son, says one; because Roland nominated Ganelon to a fearfully dangerous mission, says another. The second of these two reasons has the support of Ganelon's own statement at his trial, at least of his second statement, for he makes two, as will be recalled. His first statement, being

¹ *Extraits*, n. 17.

a riddle, has been generally left out of consideration: it is the purpose of this paper to advance the idea, based upon a new reading of line 3758, that the step-father motive, and the dangerous mission motive, were both secondary in the poet's mind, not primary; that for the poet the primary motive, the real spring of the action, was that Ganelon, being a covetous man and envious of Roland's greater wealth, had hated him on that account before ever Charles had reached the seventh year of the Spanish war. If this be the true spring and source of Ganelon's hatred, it need not be pointed out that bribe-taking would come naturally to a covetous nobleman, nor, in that case, that the two motives for the treason would fuse into one and the same. According to this view, Ganelon was a traitor in the first instance because he was passionately jealous of Roland's greater wealth, and he accepted immense bribes if only, by any and all means, he might (as we say) "get even" with his step-son. That this long-standing jealousy would flame into anger when (v. 277) Roland used in public the word *parraastre*—which may have meant "my poor imitation of a father";—also when this same Roland, apparently in entire good faith, nominates his step-father to a dangerous mission, these later factors are both interesting and valuable as accessory: but they need not have been the main source and origin of the great quarrel, of this second "wrath of Achilles" whose fatal consequences have echoed so long and so far down the centuries.

Let us briefly examine this personage, Ganelon, as the poet presents him to us. He is first introduced as one of those present at a council of war, at Cordova; Charlemagne is considering the peace proposals of King Marsile, and Count Ganelon's first utterance is to strenuously oppose the advice given by Count Roland. Roland, with much heat, had urged that Marsile's offer should be re-

jected, and that Charles should vigorously prosecute the siege of Saragossa and avenge the former murder of two French ambassadors. Ganelon, then, in a fiery speech (vv. 220-29), refers to Roland as a *bricon* (which seems to mean "a worthless fellow"), again as a *fol*, and accuses his step-son of criminal indifference to dangers run by others than himself: Roland, says Ganelon, has given us counsel in the spirit of pride and haughtiness. Naimon, the Nestor of the epic, here intervenes; he agrees with Ganelon against Roland; the French approve Naimon's opinion, and it is decided to accept the overtures of Marsile.

But a second chance for a breach comes a little later, when, according to the custom of the times, a messenger is to be selected to take the reply back to the Spanish King and to receive the Spanish tribute: Naimon, Roland, Oliver and Turpin volunteer in turn, but all are objected to by Charles. Roland thereupon nominates "Ganelon, my step-father" (v. 277) and the French at once acclaim the nomination. This act of Roland's, for some reason, at once throws Ganelon into a rage, and high words follow: "Thou fool, why art thou so venomous? People know well enough that I am thy step-father, yet thou hast nominated me to go to Marsile! If God so grant that I ever return, I will set going such a great enmity against thee it will follow thee the rest of thy life."

Roland, who is perhaps surprised at this sudden anger of the older man, retorts: "Who is it now who is guilty of pride and foolishness? It is well known that I never pay attention to threats; but" (and here his tone becomes reasoning and explanatory, if not actually apologetic) "but, for such an embassy, a sage and prudent man should be selected; if Charles is willing, I am quite ready to go in your stead."

But, to our surprise, Ganelon is not mollified, he seems to be implacable: "I accept the dangerous mission, because Charles and his Franks have so ordered it; I have no choice; but I shall not abate a jot of my anger against you personally."

When he heard this, Roland broke out in laughter.

Whereupon, Ganelon is furious; he accuses Roland of a *fals jugement* (that is, of playing a legal trick on him) altho, to an impartial witness of the scene, it must have seemed strange that the noble Ganelon should have betrayed so profound an irritation, seeing that the nomination had been in the regular procedure, the selection had seemed reasonable to all the Franks, and Roland had offered to relieve him of the disagreeable duty. But Ganelon's anger possesses him: in spite of the Emperor's repeated protests, he formally defies not only Roland, but Oliver also, and the rest of the Twelve Peers—he announces a war "to the knife" against them all.

During his journey to the Spanish court, he nurses his wrath, but once there he is strictly loyal to his mission, for it should be remembered that he has not quarreled with Charlemagne—on the contrary, he boasts at Saragossa of his sincere devotion to the Emperor.² Reversing his former policy, he now wants the war to go on; but it must be a campaign whose main purpose is to destroy Roland. He must deliver his message and run the risks involved, else he cannot justify to the world his public display of anger against Roland. As the negotiations proceed, he skilfully inflames the Saracen King's mind against Roland

*Here I must needs follow the keen analysis of Bédier, who has placed us all in his debt by showing beyond doubt or cavil that there is order and good psychology in these scenes, once thought to be inconsistent, and once cited as evidence of the fusion of two redactions of different date. See *Les Légendes épiques*, III, pp. 410-27.

personally: he invents a legend that Roland is to have one-half of all Spain—

Molt i avrez orgoillos parçonier!

He even makes Roland responsible for the continuation of the Spanish war (vv. 544, 557); he will keep Charles out of Spain not by attacking Charles directly, but by removing Charles' "right arm" (v. 597). It is at this late stage, be it noted, that Ganelon is offered rich presents: there are ten mules laden with the gold of Araby, and he is promised the same magnificent gift each year in the future. These gifts evidently do not *cause* the treason; they are a reward for it; the treason had been determined during Ganelon's trip in company with Blancandrin, and at that time no gifts or bribes were even hinted at. The treason is foreshadowed at line 404, to be exact, but gifts are not mentioned before line 515, and they do not become prominent in the action until 620 ff.

On his return to the French army, Ganelon conceals his malice as well as his treachery. He is praised for his able discharge of the difficult errand; he bides his time; when in due course it is a question as to who shall command the exposed rearguard, he promptly answers with a parody of Roland's nomination: "Roland, this step-son of mine," or we may translate: "this poor imitation of a son that I have," and this nomination not being contradicted, the appointment is made. One wonders why Charlemagne himself does not object, but, as Bédier says, he cannot well do so, seeing that Ganelon has so faithfully and successfully accomplished the dangerous mission put upon him by Roland: his mouth is stopped. "Sir step-father," said Roland, "my affection for you should surely be great, for you have put upon me this dangerous duty; but let me tell you that Charles will have no cause to regret my appoint-

ment"; and Ganelon answers, ironically conceding this trifling matter to Roland's pride: "You tell the truth, I know that very well."

There is now no question of Ganelon until line 844, where the author (let us call him Tuoldus, for the sake of peace) takes care to inform us:

The felon Guenes had treacherously wrought;
From pagan king has had his rich reward:
Silver and gold and veils and silken cloth,
Camels, lions, with many a mule and horse.

(Moncrief's translation, 1919.)

We may infer that in the poet's mind Ganelon was covetous.

At vv. 1024-25, Oliver expresses suspicion of Ganelon, but assigns no motive. At v. 1147, Roland shares Oliver's suspicions, and says:

Gold hath he taken, much wealth is his to keep;
King Marsilès hath bargained for us cheap,
But with the sword he needs must take his purchase.

Again we may infer that, in Roland's mind, Ganelon was covetous.

There is nothing striking now until the trial scene. Charles makes a formal accusation before the plenary court, and his charge is "treason": He caused me to lose twenty thousand of my French, including my nephew, and Oliver—

And the Twelve Peers hath he betrayed *for wealth*.

This then is the current theory: Ganelon has betrayed in return for costly bribes; neither Charles, nor Oliver, nor Roland apparently has any other idea; they do not know, or at least they do not speak, of any hatred between the two men. But we note that Ganelon's greed, his thirst for riches is well known to them, and to French nobles of the

eleventh century greed for riches was enough to explain the crime in all its enormity.

We now turn to the important matter of Ganelon's formal defense when on trial for his life. He makes two speeches in defense, and these are not necessarily repetitions; in fact, it would be quite reasonable and even customary if the defendant shifted his ground on finding that his first defense met with no favor. In the first speech, unfortunately, the reading is corrupt, the line is a puzzle, and we shall therefore leave it aside for a moment. The second line of defense (v. 3771) is a counter-charge: "Roland hated me first; by nominating me to the Spanish mission he deliberately sought my death and my distress"; but while this accusation is also found in V⁴ (vv. 5898-5900) and elsewhere, we have seen that it is plainly groundless, because Roland openly offered to go in Ganelon's place: Ganelon refused as any irritated and angry man would, being unwilling to be under any sort of obligation to his opponent. No, this cannot be the real reason for the hatred, and the real reason, in my opinion, is to be sought in the first speech, in a difficult line which must now be considered in detail.

Lines 3758-59 in the Oxford manuscript read:

Roll' me forfist en or & en aueir

Pur que io quis sa mort & sun destreit.

Gaston Paris³ had good reason to be emphatic in his dissatisfaction with the first line as it stands: "Le vers est faux, le sens obscur, la construction louche, et à quoi peut bien se rapporter cette accusation singulière? Il n'y a là sans doute qu'une faute de copiste." The meter is indeed wrong, for there is one syllable too many, the sense is obscure, the construction is squint-eyed, and what can this

³ *Romania*, XI, 497; cf. II, 110.

strange accusation mean anyway? The great scholar's comment is somewhat querulous; he suspects that something of importance may be hidden here, not as in one of Dante's *versi strani* but because of a copyist's mere blunder or alteration. Is the line beyond emendation and recovery?

Léon Gautier, to go no further back, proceeds with a timidity which contrasts with his fits of boldness elsewhere; he lets the line stand entirely unchanged and is forced to elide *me* before a consonant, which of course is inadmissible. He translates: "D'or et d'argent Roland m'avait fait tort," which leaves us still in darkness. Theodor Müller, the "sage and prudent," did not venture to correct the line, and as he has no commentary, we do not know how he evaded the metric difficulty and the squint-eyed construction. Twenty years ago, Stengel restored the meter by replacing the word *Rollanz* by the pronoun *C'il* and keeping the pronoun (*me*); but again we do not know how he understood the line when thus emended. Tavernier, in one of his latest articles (*Zeitschrift f. roman. Phil.* xxxix) would change *en or* to *en cors*: "Roland had evil designs upon my life and property." But there is no warrant for *cors*, and we are no further along even if we should adopt this mysterious accusation.⁴

The pronoun *me* must certainly be eliminated, because of the meter. Instead of *forfist* I propose to read *sorfist*: *sorfaire* would be used here intransitively and would mean "to be overweening in," "to be arrogant, or intolerably boastful, about." It is a somewhat rare verb in Central French, but common in the West; the participle *sorfait*, applied to persons, is especially frequent, also *sorfaitos*;

⁴For the discussion up to 1905, see Brückner's *Das Verhältnis des frz. Rolandsliedes zur Turpinschen Chronik u. zum Carmen de Prodicionne Guenonis*, pp. 94-102.

the English took over the noun *sorfait* and made much of the word: we have *surfeit*, also ME *surfeitous*, and *surfeiting*. Everard of Kirkham (thirteenth century) translating the *Distichs of Cato*, III. 19, warns his readers not to be *sorfeitos en parole*, where the Latin has: *Inter convivas fac sis sermone modestus*. Evidently, he who is *sorfeitos en parole* is *sermone immodestus*. Tobler has discussed the adjective *sorfait* in the *Vermischte Beiträge* (I, p. 133) as meaning "übermütig, anmassend," while the *Roman de Thèbes* uses the noun thus:

Mout hé, fait il, enrievreté
E sorfait en grant poesté. (vv. 8281-82).

"I despise," said he, "insolence and highhandedness in the use of great power." It is a sort of *desmesure* in riches that Ganelon complains of: the nephew of Charlemagne was unbearably superior in his wealth.⁵

As to how the wrong reading *me forfist* originated, more than one reasonable explanation may be suggested:

1. The confusion of (*f*) and the old-fashioned long (*f*) is, of course, frequent.
2. Without laborious search I have noted five or six instances in Old French manuscripts in which the common *forfaire* has been substituted for the rarer *sorfaire*; let us glance at these, for the matter is essential to the argument. Marie de France, *Fables*, p. 173: *sorfait* of the original has the two variants *forfait* and *mesfait*. Robert Grosse-teste, *Chateau d'Amor* (thirteenth century) ed. Murray, 1918, line 970, *surfetus* "arrogant," variant in H *forfeitous*. Also line 1131 *Pur nos surfez*, variant in PE *forfetz*. In the *Enseignemenz* of Robert de Ho (ed. Miss Young, p. 82), line 1176 *grant sorfet*, the other MS.

⁵ Cf. Trevisa: "But he . . . overdede in godringe of money." Eng. 'overdo,' in this sense, may reproduce the French *sorfaire*.

has *grant forfait*. Paul Meyer, in his glossary to *Guillaume le Mareschal*, enters *sorfait* "excès, acte abusif" no less than eleven times, and adds: "souvent écrit *forfait* dans le manuscrit." Wendelin Foerster, in editing one of his last texts, the *Marvels of Rigomer*, line 16818, says: "*Sorfait* habe ich aus *forfait* gebessert, denn es ist wohl Uebermut, wenn er das tat, aber kein Verbrechen." So, I believe, here in the *Roland* we are dealing not with a breach of law but with a breach of ethics: Roland was arrogant as to his gold and his wealth, and Ganelon, the older man, had not been able to forgive it in him. The confusion between the two verbs was the easier because their spheres of connotation in part coincided: thus, in the *Promptorium Parvulorum* (ca. 1440) we have the entry, *surfetyn*, or *forfetyn yn trespace*, *forefacio*, *delinquo* (484.2). An excess easily runs over into a misdemeanor.

3. The reading *forfist* may be taken over from Thierry's words, line 3827:

Que que Rollanz (a) Guenelon forsfesist

words which, in that connection, are perfectly clear and idiomatic:

Whatever wrong Roland may have done to Ganelon

(Being in Charles' service should have been ample protection to Roland.)

All who have to do with text-criticism are familiar with cases in which a passage has been altered to assimilate it to a familiar line or expression elsewhere in the same text. E. Moore, in his *Textual Criticism of the Divina Commedia* (pp. xiii-xiv) has quite a list of instances: thus, *Inf.* ii, 86 *Dirotti brevemente* has been altered in some MSS. to *Dirotti molto breve* because of iii, 45, *Dicerolti molto breve*. In one case, says Moore, "the scribe in O naïvely admits having altered the text in *Purg.* xiv, 87, to adapt

it to *Purg.* xv, 45." There are several well-known cases of the same proceeding in the text of the New Testament.⁶

If, then, the confusion of the two verbs is probable from the point of view of paleography; if we find numerous cases where the common *forfaire* was substituted for the unusual *sorfaire*; if the scribe may easily have taken *forfist* from 3827, where the source of the trouble between Ganelon and Roland is likewise in question; and, finally, if the change gives us correct instead of incorrect meter, and excellent grammar instead of a squint-eyed construction, we have, I believe, a strong case for *sorfist* in Roland 3758. But all this is *provided* that the new meaning also suits the context, the general situation, and the psychology of the characters. Here, I am convinced, is an equally strong argument for the change: unless we suppose some previous irritation in Ganelon's mind, one perhaps of long standing, his sudden anger when spoken to in public by Roland must remain more or less of an enigma,⁷ the other two motives seem insufficient; but once granted that Roland had been taking more than his share of booty and that he had been haughty and overbearing in doing so, in that case the anger of the older man, who is also a proud person of high rank, becomes quite intelligible. We should have one of those eternal frictions between youth and age, between experience and inexperience, between prudence and imprudence, which are as old as the race; situations often productive of quarrels and not seldom of tragedy. Does not the younger Achilles rage against the older Agamemnon: "My hands bear the brunt of furious war, but when the apportioning

⁶ See Mitchell's *Critical Handbook of the New Testament* (1896), p. 119.

⁷ Thus Bédier (III, 413) well says: "une haine obscure, ancienne, dont lui-même ne sait pas encore toute l'intensité, l'âme contre son fillâtre."

comes then is thy meed far ampler, and I betake myself to the ships with some small thing . . . nor am I minded here in dishonor to draw thee thy fill of riches and wealth " (*Iliad* I, 165-71). Was it not just such a jealousy between the younger and the older man that provoked the father of Chimène into striking Don Diègue?

On the other hand, it is Roland's *desmesure* which allows him to risk in the public assembly the ambiguous word *parrastre*, which might have meant, among the crowd, "my poor imitation of a father"; his excess of self-confidence enables him to laugh aloud at his formidable step-father's threat. This is the same Roland who, later on, makes light of the triple warning of the more cautious Oliver and thereby works his own doom and that of the flower of Charlemagne's army.

The suddenness of Ganelon's anger at his nomination by Roland has in fact been a stumbling-block to critics from very early times. In our own day, the objection has been that Ganelon, upon hearing himself nominated, speaks too soon; he does not await Charles' confirmation, and hence, in common phrase, he cries before he is hurt. But this objection has been founded upon what seems to me the mistaken notion that in the *Chanson de Roland* nominations were necessarily made, or at least necessarily confirmed, by Charlemagne; a more attentive study, however, of the poem shows (at this time I am unable to judge to what extent this usage was that of ancient Germanic law) that the nomination was made by a powerful noble, and unless a more powerful noble proposed another candidate the first nomination prevailed, provided the general voice approved. Charles apparently had little or nothing to do with these selections, unless, like any other noble present, he objected, in which case no doubt no one would be found bold enough to challenge him. When Roland is

selected for the rearguard, the veteran Duke Naimon says (776-79): "Count Roland is very much disturbed: the rearguard has been adjudged to him, and you have no baron who can relieve him of the charge," that is, no one present who would dare to oppose a nomination made by so great a noble as Ganelon, brother-in-law of the emperor;⁸ and we have seen above why Charles himself cannot object, much as he would like to. There is therefore no weight at all in the objection that Ganelon cries out before he is officially appointed: he *has* been officially appointed, and Bédier has only to point to the companion-scene (740 ff.) in which Roland likewise "speaks too soon," before Charles has confirmed the nomination.⁹

But even with this factor removed, some difficulty in accounting for Ganelon's immediate violence remains. Perhaps the best indication of this is that it seems to have shocked one of the earliest copyists of the poem and led him to transpose a certain number of laisses. In all the MSS. and versions of the Beta group (this would include not only V⁴, C and V⁷, but also the Norse and German versions) laisse XX was split into two parts, and the sequence (keeping the numbers as they occur in O) became XXa, XXIV, XXIII, XXb, XXI, XXII, XXV. The effect of the shift is to make Ganelon's anger gradual, not sudden. Theodor Müller, as is well known, adopted this Beta order in his edition, and he was followed by Gautier, Clédât, Stengel, and others. In 1909 Luquiens and in 1912 Bédier came forward to defend the order of O as it stands: Bédier declared O's order to be "more coherent, more logical, and more artistic."¹⁰ Note that

⁸ This was also the interpretation of Gaston Paris (*Romania* II, 109).

⁹ *Les Légendes épiques*, III, 469.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, III, p. 462 ff.

Bédier defended the order in O even without the aid of the motive revealed in the new reading of Ganelon's first defense. As to the suddenness of Ganelon's anger, Bédier said, somewhat vaguely: "Ce geste (that of angrily throwing off his marten furs) est plein de sens, par sa soudaineté," but many other critics, beginning with Lanson and going back to the copyist first responsible for the transposed laisses, have taken the other view.

We may say, therefore, that the change from *forfist* of the MS. to *sorfist* has the great merit of uniting the two epic motives, bribes and personal hatred, into one. Ganelon, by reason of Roland's greater wealth, was already jealous of him; exasperated anew by being singled out for a dangerous mission by the person who had already irritated him; probably also suspecting that the emperor's haughty nephew was seeking to make him laughable by using the ambiguous word *parraistre*, Ganelon flames out in violent quarrel the moment Roland speaks; he vows Roland's destruction by fair means or foul, not neglecting, however, the *défi* in due form; having decided on this, he is not in the least averse to rich gifts which may enable him to surpass his step-son in magnificence and display. Covetousness, greed, *auri sacra fames*—the ancient sin, is thus the cause of Count Ganelon's epic wrath and tragic downfall; and it needs no general justification. In Dante's *Hell*, is not the crowd of money-lovers the largest crowd of all? In Virgil, too, it is the *maxima turba*. So in the *Nibelungenlied*, and if anyone should doubt the authenticity of greed and avarice, of envy of another's wealth, as motives for the high-born noble of about the year 1100, he has only to re-read the historians of the First Crusade; let him review the actions of Bohemond and his nephew Tancred, of Stephen of Blois and Raymond of Toulouse; let him notice how often and how bitterly these nobles

taunted each other with greed, or murmured at each other's wealth; let him notice the furious quarrels over booty and fiefs which threatened more than once to ruin the expedition which, by a sort of miracle, ended in a *Gerusalemme liberata*. Or, nearer at home, one has only to observe, in the pages of Thierry and of Freeman, the role that booty played in the Norman conquest of England.

It was Count Roland's misfortune, possessing as he did the great faults of his heroic virtues, it was his misfortune to stir up in an able, proud and covetous man the primal passions of envy, anger and malice; against the treason brought on by these he struggled heroically, but, as the poet describes to us, in vain. It is a moving spectacle, and the world has always thought so.

“What gifts hath Fate for all his chivalry?
Even such as hearts heroic oftenest win;
Honor, a friend, anguish, untimely death.”

T. ATKINSON JENKINS.